



The Motivational Editor

Helping Writers Go from Unpublished to Published

CREATING UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS

DEBRA L. BUTTERFIELD

DebraLButterfield.com



The Motivational Editor

Helping Writers Go from Unpublished to Published

NOTICE: You do NOT have the right to reprint or resell this report.

You also may not give away, sell, or share this content.

© 2019 Debra L. Butterfield. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any form whatsoever, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without the express written, dated, and signed permission from the author.

Creating Unforgettable Characters



Without unforgettable characters in a story, do you lose interest? I do. But how do you create these characters?

Let's get real, whether we do it consciously or unconsciously, we want to connect with story characters. We want to discover something about them that we share—their life goals, ethnicity, age, life experience, etc.

This shared connection draws us into the story and helps us care about what happens to the characters.

To Create Unforgettable Characters Give Them Depth

Humans are three dimensional beings—spirit, soul, and body. But we often fail to show all three dimensions in our story.

So, let's start by analyzing your fiction work in progress (WIP).

What do you know about your protagonist and antagonist?

- Do you know how they look (body), think and feel (soul), and the condition of their spirit (godly or ungodly)?
- Do you know their personality type, their goals, their motivations?
- What are their flaws or vulnerabilities?
- Why do they get angry, sad, or excited?
- About what are they passionate and why?
- What in their life history has made them the way they are today?
- Why are they in conflict with each other and what are their internal conflicts?
- How do your protagonist's and antagonist's characteristics play into the conflicts you've designed for your story?

These character features and more influence how they act and react as you throw obstacles at them on their way to obtaining their goals.

Give your unforgettable characters depth.

Values, Passions, and Goals

What are your characters' values?

Those values underpin the characters' passions and guide their behavior. For example, if your character values friendship, then having that character treat people rudely is in direct conflict to her values.

Of course, this could be a point of growth or conflict in the story. If so, then you are intentionally developing that throughout the story.

Here is a [list of personal core values](#) to help you (does not constitute endorsement of site). Do some brainstorming; let the list guide you rather than put you in a box.

The character's values directly impact her passions. If your character values justice, a connecting passion could be to help the innocent by becoming a lawyer.

Create Goals that Match Passions

So, what is your protagonist passionate about? Your antagonist? These passions can serve as connection points for your reader as I mentioned above.

Remember antagonists are regular people with values, passions, and goals that they believe are good and pure even though they often come into direct conflict with the protagonist's goal.

Is your protagonist passionate about:

- unborn babies
- the environment
- nature.

Using the above passions your character may want to:

- establish a pregnancy resource center across the street from the local abortion clinic
- expose the local chemical factory's illegal dumping of waste into the city's river
- convince town hall to create a local wildlife refuge out of the swamp on the edge of town.

Your character's passions and goals will directly and indirectly affect her beliefs, thoughts, actions, and reactions. The reader will recognize when your character acts and thinks in a way that contradicts her ruling passions and goals.

Pro and Ant may both may be passionate about unborn babies, but have different goals in serving that passion—e.g. your protagonist opens a PRC, but your antagonist bombs abortion clinics.

The choices are as wide open as your imagination.

Give your characters passions that match their values, and goals that match their passions.

Keep Track of Your Characters

All of the above is a lot to remember about your major and supporting characters. In order to keep track of these details I use a tool from *The Writer's Little Helper* by James V. Smith, Jr. I expanded on what Smith had to offer and call it a character profile.

If you are planning a series, this character profile is particularly useful. Believe it or not, your fans will notice when your protagonist visits her mother in book two, when in book one you stated she was an orphan. This profile will also keep you on track if your character begins to take over and lead you down the wrong path.

I'm all about making life simple. Download my [character profile](#) rather than creating one of your own.

Use a character profile to create and track the essentials about your unforgettable characters.

Part 2 of this series will take a look at how to develop your character's personality.

Recommended reading: [Unleash the Writer Within](#) by Cecil Murphey and [The Writer's Little Helper](#) by James V. Smith, Jr. (affiliate links).

Creating Unforgettable Characters, Part 2, Temperament



We've all met them: Miss Sunshine, Mr. Easy Going, Mrs. Bossy, and Ms. Perfectionist. We often chalk it up to "that's just who they are," but these titles describe specific temperaments. If you're not careful, they can become stereotypes.

The *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Collegiate Dictionary* defines temperament as "characteristic or habitual inclination or mode of emotional response." Experts consider it innate (we're born with it). Personality is acquired. Read [this article](#) to better understand the differences.

Determining Temperament

The four types above are sanguine (Miss Sunshine, cheerful), phlegmatic (Mr. Easy Going, laid back), choleric (Mrs. Bossy, commanding), melancholy (Ms. Perfectionist, tends to sadness). Visit [here](#) for a detailed overview.

Many writers are familiar with these tools:

- [Keirsej Temperament Overview](#)
- Develop your character by taking the [Keirsej test](#) and responding as your character would respond.
- Myers-Briggs. [Take the test.](#)
- [DISC](#)
- [Enneagrams](#)

Examine each to determine which one works best for you.

Each temperament has its own:

- strengths and weaknesses,
- mode of communication,
- and specific qualities that affect the way a person thinks and acts.

Like many things in life, the boundaries blend. In other words, no one is purely just one temperament.

Having even a rudimentary understanding opens the door to variety in your characters and adds potential points of conflict. The more you know, the more you can develop and manipulate your characters' thoughts and actions.

For example, in Keirse's temperaments, the Guardian communicates using external everyday realities. The Idealist communicates using ideas and theories. Put the two together in a conversation and you can have conflict or humor or both.

A book I use to help me develop characters that are outside my own temperament is [Please Understand Me II](#) by David Keirse (affiliate link).

Give your characters a specific temperament.

Go Beyond the Obvious Physical Aspects



The obvious physical features we all use to immediately qualify a person are eye and hair color, height, and weight. Can you use these features to make your characters memorable while also advancing your story line?

For example, in Sandra Balzo's Maggy Thorsen series, character Jake Pavlik has eyes that change color according to his mood. Once Maggy discovers this, she uses it to her advantage.

When creating your characters' features, consider the less obvious qualities such as voice (think Fran Drescher) and bone structure (Hulk-like). Does he/she have a striking feature? A nose that rivals the black diamond downhill at Aspen? Hands the size of cantaloupe?

However, if you're going to create such a feature, don't mention it once and forget about it. Allow it to play a role—those cantaloupe hands are your antagonist's weapons.

Sanguines tend to like the glittery and colorful. Maybe your protagonist always wears Hawaiian shirts or carries a glitzy purse the size of a great Dane. A melancholy prefers subdued colors like black, brown, and navy blue. So wearing a red sequin dress will be excruciating for her.

Is your character quirky? Have her wear reflector vest orange lipstick. Is he phlegmatic? Have him wear clothes that look like he slept in them. In fact, maybe that's exactly what he does.

Think about Harry Potter and his round eyeglasses, Columbo and his rumpled overcoat, Snow White and her snow white complexion. You get the point.

Utilize appearance to develop unforgettable characters.

Creating Unforgettable Characters, Part 3, Culture



Culture impacts your story more than you might realize. Distinct cultures exist even within the US, just as there are many dialects.

A person's name often indicates one's heritage, and thus culture. Did you know the name Dobby, a character from the Harry Potter series, was a real word?

I discovered quite by accident one day playing Scrabble that the word is a British dialect meaning fool. No doubt J.K. Rowling's British readers knew the importance of the word. To me it was just a strange name to match a strange little creature, until I learned the word's meaning.

Like a computer organizes files, we classify people by certain qualities the instant we meet, and that includes a person's name. Let me offer an example: "I just met Sean O'Malley." If you know nothing else about this person, what possible clues have I given you about the character?

Be as particular about the name you give your character as you are about his or her physical build, temperament, and personality.

Names carry meaning and speak of the culture of origin. If your character is from Ireland wouldn't it seem rather odd if she had a Chinese name? But if the character has one parent who visited China as a child and fell in love with the country, then it makes sense. However, you must reveal this tidbit of information in the story. Otherwise, the reader will question your credibility as a writer.

Every reader may not catch the importance of a character's name, as I did with Dobby. But make every word work for its space on the page and don't discount your reader's intelligence.

Visit here to discover more about the [meaning of names](#).

Make your characters' names work for you.

Elements of Culture

Many writers often overlook culture in their fiction or only give an obligatory mention of color. The ways culture affects communication could take up an entire series. I'll discuss a few of these today and a couple more next week.

What do you think of when you think of culture? Do you consider:

- power distance
- body language
- indirect communication
- direct communication
- high context
- low context
- slang
- individualistic society
- collectivist society
- history

Until I took a communications course in college, I was clueless about most of the items in the list above. But these cultural dynamics are ripe with opportunities for comedic episodes, confusion, misunderstandings, and conflict between your characters that can move your story forward.

Learn about communication styles and use them to your advantage.

Cultural Differences

In our diverse society, adding ethnicity to your story is natural. But by all means, **AVOID STEREOTYPES**.

You can't willy-nilly throw in cultural characteristics about your story people. Your readers from that culture will spot your errors and they won't hesitate to let others know you got it wrong.

If you have a Portuguese character that interacts with your bad guy, know whether Portugal is an individualistic or collectivist society. Is their communication direct or indirect, low-context or high-context? Each of those things will drive the way you construct the dialog for that character.

Search on these words, "intercultural communication [country of interest]," to discover the cultural differences of other countries. [International Business Cultures](#) is an excellent source to learn about these concepts.

With a bit of research, you can make your story more culturally accurate and rich with character depth.

Do you have a friend from a culture you want to include in your story? Ask if he/she would be willing to read your manuscript and offer feedback.

Know the culture you are targeting.

What Is Power Distance?



When you sit down across the table from an editor to pitch your story, who in the relationship has the greater degree of power?

Who has power in a parent-child relationship?

In America when a man and a woman interact, even for the very first time, whom do you think holds greater power?

We call this power distance (social hierarchy), and it can serve to add conflict, humor, confusion, and much more to your story.

Power distance varies among countries, and that's why I've chosen to put this under our discussion on culture. For a quick understanding of power distance think about the accessibility between an employee and boss in the US and those in China.

Power distance varies according to three things:

- relationship (as in parent/child),
- position (boss/worker), and
- situation (attacker/victim).

You want to show your characters, especially your protagonist and antagonist, in varying power distance circumstances.

The *Motivational* Editor

Never let your protagonist act in a way that will put him/her in a lesser position of power with the antagonist.

Here's an illustration:

The antagonist broke into the home of your protagonist and seized Pro in a choke hold. If Pro whimpers and cowers, Pro has lost power and will lose respect in your reader's eye.

However, if Pro resists and makes eye contact that speaks defiance, Pro maintains power over Ant, and your reader can continue to cheer for Pro (even if Pro is kidnapped by Ant).

Take note of the words "whimper, cower, resist, defiance." They communicate degrees of power. Work to find the best words to communicate your intent.

Employ power distance with your characters.

Creating Unforgettable Characters, Part 4, Body Language



If you close your eyes during a meeting, what message are you sending your colleagues? Is that message universal?

Body Language

While there are several facial expressions universal to the world, the interpretation of body language varies from culture to culture. Misinterpreted body language opens the door to miscommunication. For the fiction writer, this means the opportunity to advance the conflict between your protagonist and antagonist.

Do you consider yourself adept at deciphering body language? Test your skill with [this quiz](#). (I scored an 85/100.)

To dive deeper into the cultural differences in body language, here are several resources:

- <https://www.liveseysolar.com/cultural-differences-in-body-language-and-universal-facial-expressions/>
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/understand-body-language-and-facial-expressions-4147228>
- <https://www.mosalingua.com/en/body-language-world/>
- <https://www.businessinsider.com/body-language-around-the-world-2015-3>

Slang

Slang suffers the same difficulties. In fact, let's make it challenging. Slang in the US differs from region to region. Here's a fun [article](#). I've lived in eight different states and overseas. Not only that, my time in the military contributed a lot of military jargon to my vocabulary. I use a wide variety of words to describe the same thing. What do you call a carbonated beverage? I tend to use soda pop, which according to the above article, isn't in popular use anywhere in the US.

Slang also changes with the times. In my younger days, the word "pimp" meant a prostitute's boss. It is still used that way today, but it has also taken on the meaning of taking something that's plain and making it stylish and customized, as in "Pimp My Ride." When my kids use slang, I often ask for clarification.

So why are body language and slang important?

Communication is sending messages, and there is more to the message than just words. If we misinterpret body language

or slang, we misunderstand the message.

Add spice to your story and new avenues of conflict by including characters from other cultures. But be sure to give your dialog and characters authenticity by knowing cultural or regional communication differences.

Step outside your culture and have some fun.

Space Invasion

An aspect of culture that most people recognize is personal space. In America, our space bubble is big in comparison to cultures like India where there are so many people. To give you a visual, according to [The World Bank](#), the population density in 2018 of the US is 36 people per square kilometer (0.6 of a mile). In India, it is 455 people per square kilometer. For West Bank and Gaza it is 759!

How might this population density affect one's personal space bubble?

In doing research for my current fiction WIP, I learned that bears even have a space bubble. I imagine that extends to a lot of animals. That space where the animal either feels threatened or not, whether by a predator or another of its kind.

Speaking of animals, we have to rely on body language when they approach us. How do feel when a dog invades your personal space even if it isn't growling, barking, or wagging its tail? Your reaction will probably depend on previous experience and your interpretation of the dog's body language.

Depending on the situation, a person who invades our space can make us feel uncomfortable in the least and terrified at worst. Even if there is no cultural difference between your protagonist and antagonist, you can use the concept of personal space to your advantage.

For a fun, 1:39 minute video that illustrates personal space, visit [here](#). Be sure to watch all the way to the end to see how one man resolved having his personal space invaded. It may give you the idea for which you've been looking for that scene that's giving you fits.

For more info on the personal space culture variations, check out [this article](#) from the *Washington Post*.

Personal space invasion. Use it to your advantage.



Creating Unforgettable Characters, Part5, Conflict



Conflict. In real life, most people try to avoid it, but a story without conflict is like a latte without coffee. In fact, if your story has no conflict, you haven't got a story.

Let's first look at conflict from a big picture view: external and internal.

External conflict comes from outside your character—the people, circumstances, or forces of nature your protagonist faces in reaching the story goal.

Internal conflict comes from within your character. Fears, lack of confidence, false beliefs, and more that hinder your character reaching the goal. Quite often, the internal struggle isn't apparent to your character until later in the story.

The conflicts (external or internal) must be plausible and legitimate, not contrived. Think about your favorite novels. Can you identify the external conflict of the protagonist? The internal?

Your character's conflicts create a journey for her. As your story progresses, so must the conflict. Take the character from point A to point B to point C and so on, meeting increasingly difficult obstacles along the way. Each obstacle brings a setback or a victory and change in your character for good or for bad. If she is the same in the end as she was in the beginning, she comes off as flat and unmemorable. And dare I say it, the reader might come away from the book disappointed.

Many stories end happy—the conflict meets a positive outcome when the protagonist triumphs. But we all cope with struggles differently and not everyone comes through life's experiences a better person. Wherever your character ends up, it should be believable and consistent with the rest of the story.

Throughout this series on unforgettable characters, I've pointed out



many potential areas to create conflict. I hope you'll consider them for your WIP.

For more on conflict, read my blog post "[How to Review Your Story Scenes for Conflict](#)"

Take your characters on a journey of conflict.

Backstory



What is backstory? In a nutshell, backstory is your character's history. Our family and life experiences affect who we are. Our fictional characters are no different. You may have birthed them today as full-grown adults, but they still have a mother and father. They grew up and had experiences that play into who they are in your story today.

Is your antagonist a paraplegic? From birth or an accident? How does it affect his/her behavior, life outlook, and mental attitude?

Is your protagonist a radical feminist? Who are the people who influenced her beliefs? Was her grandmother a 1960s hippy who reveled in her freedom and taught her granddaughter to do the same? Or was she a hard-working, degreed single woman who was always passed over for

promotions that went to less qualified men?

Do you see how these pieces of character history can impact your story characters' reactions to the obstacles they face along the way?

What of your character's history is important to your story?

Ask yourself questions about each major character until you discover all you need to know about them. You may also want to do this to a certain degree with your supporting (minor) characters. Like the research you may do for your story, you will not reveal all that history to the reader. But it will help you recognize when your story people act out of character. It also helps you know how to show that character acting abnormally when the plot calls for it.

Revealing these tidbits gives your reader insight into why the character behaves the way he/she does and allows your reader to create an emotional connection to your story characters. How much you reveal is up to you, but like the physical characteristics, you will reveal them a little at a time.

As I discussed in part one, I recommend you use a [Character Profile](#) to keep track of your story people.

Errors with Backstory

Many new writers make two major errors with backstory: they put it in chapter one and they use too much at a time.

Backstory doesn't belong in chapter one! And when you do reveal it, reveal only as much as necessary at that point in the story.

Here's an example for a first revelation:

Danny cringed as he remembered the horrendous head-on collision with a semi that left him a paraplegic.

In a later chapter, you can reveal more to give greater depth to the character's struggle:

If only he'd stopped for the night instead of pushing himself to finish that fourteen-hour drive to Mom and Dad's house. A ghost pain shot through his left leg as he relived the agony of being crushed against the dash.

Backstory adds depth to your characters and your novel. Use it wisely.

ABOUT DEBRA L. BUTTERFIELD



Debra dreamed of being a writer since she was a pre-teen. Fulfillment of that dream began when she was forty-five years old and Focus on the Family hired her as a junior copy writer. In 2006, she stepped into the world of freelance writer. In 2014, she joined CrossRiver Media group as an editor, and in 2018 stepped into the role of editorial director.

She is passionate about helping other writers in their journey to publication because for over fifteen years, fear and doubt about her abilities kept her from even trying to be a writer. She doesn't want that to happen to others. She blogs about writing at DebraLButterfield.com, and does freelance editing in addition to her editorial work with CrossRiver.

She is the author of *Unshakable Faith* (a Bible study), *7 Cheat Sheets for Cutting Editing Costs*, *Abba's Promise*, *Carried by Grace*, and *Mystery on Maple Hill* (a short story ebook). She has contributed stories to numerous anthologies that include *Miracles and Moments of Grace: Inspiring Stories of Survival*, *2014 Penned from the Heart*, and *The Benefit Package*. Her magazine credits include CBN. com, *Susie, Live*, *The Vision*, and *On Course* online, writer's newsletters, and guest blogs.

Debra is a US Marine Corps veteran, enjoys the outdoors and, oddly enough, likes the smell of skunks. (Her kids always tell her take a deep breath whenever they smell one.) Like most writers, she loves to read, usually not one book at a time either. She has lived as far west as Hawaii and as far east as Germany and lots of places in between. Now living in Missouri, Debra has three adult children and two grandchildren.